

Migratory Landbird Conservation on the Mendocino National Forest

Under the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), the Forest Service is directed to “provide for diversity of plant and animal communities based on the suitability and capability of the specific land area in order to meet overall multiple-use objectives.” (P.L. 94-588, Sec 6 (g) (3) (B)). The January 2000 USDA Forest Service (FS) Landbird Conservation Strategic Plan, followed by Executive Order 13186 in 2001, in addition to the Partners in Flight (PIF) specific habitat Conservation Plans for birds and the January 2004 PIF North American Landbird Conservation Plan all reference goals and objectives for integrating bird conservation into forest management and planning.

In late 2008, a *Memorandum of Understanding between the USDA Forest Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to Promote the Conservation of Migratory Birds* was signed. The intent of the MOU is to strengthen migratory bird conservation through enhanced collaboration and cooperation between the Forest Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service as well as other federal, state, tribal and local governments. Within the National Forests, conservation of migratory birds focuses on providing a diversity of habitat conditions at multiple spatial scales and ensuring that bird conservation is addressed when planning for land management activities. In early 2016, both USDA Forest Service and US Fish and Wildlife Service have agreed to extend the MOU as currently written.

The Mendocino National Forest is proposing to manage lands on the Upper Lake Ranger District located in the Dashiell, Benmore, Packsaddle, Lower Bucknell, and Upper Bucknell 7th field watersheds. Proposed management is intended to implement direction contained within the Mendocino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP, USFS 1995). Opportunities to promote conservation of migratory birds and their habitats in the project area were considered during development and design of the Pine Mountain Late Successional Reserve Habitat Enhancement and Protection project (MOU Section C: items 1 and 11 and Section D: item 3).

Likely impacts to habitats and select migratory bird populations resulting from the Pine Mountain project have been assessed in detail within the project MIS report and impacts to select TES birds and their habitats have been analyzed in the project BA or BE. These impacts are summarized below:

Table 1 - Summary of effects from the proposed action to Forest Service Sensitive Species

FS Sensitive Species	Habitat Within Project Area	Determination
Northern Spotted Owl	Yes	May affect, not likely to adversely affect
Northern goshawk	Yes	May affect individuals, but will not likely result in a trend toward Federal listing
Bald Eagle	Yes	May affect individuals, but will not likely result in a trend toward Federal listing
Pallid bat	Yes	May affect individuals, but will not likely result in a trend toward Federal listing
Townsend's big-eared bat	Yes	May affect individuals, but will not likely result in a trend toward Federal listing
North American wolverine	No, lacks adequate snow cover, but provides forage opportunities	Will not result in a trend toward Federal listing
Pacific marten	Yes	May affect individuals, but will not likely result in a trend toward Federal listing
Pacific fisher	Yes	May affect individuals, but will not likely result in a trend toward Federal listing
Fringed myotis	Yes	May affect individuals, but will not likely result in a trend toward Federal listing
Foothill yellow-legged frog	Yes	Will not result in a trend toward Federal listing
Western pond turtle	Yes	May affect individuals, but will not likely result in a trend toward Federal listing
Karin's checkerspot butterfly	No, Hull Mountain is about 10 miles to the NW	Will not result in a trend toward Federal listing
Willow flycatcher	No, outside of range	Will not result in a trend toward Federal listing

Table 2 - Summary of effect from the proposed action on designated Northern spotted owl Critical Habitat

PCE	Treatment Prescription 1	Treatment Prescription 2	Treatment Prescription 3	Treatment Prescription 4	Treatment Prescription 5	Treatment Prescription 6	Prescribed Fire (in conjunction with other treatments)
1 – Forest Type	Will not modify	Will not modify	Will not modify	Will not modify	Will not modify	Will not modify	Will not modify
2 – Nesting/Roosting Habitat	Will not remove	Will not remove	Modifies but maintains	Modifies but maintains	Will not modify	Modifies but maintains	Modifies but maintains
3 – Foraging Habitat	Will not remove	Will not remove	Modifies but maintains	Modifies but maintains	Will not modify	Modifies but maintains	Modifies but maintains
4 – Dispersal Habitat	Modifies but	Modifies but	Modifies but	Modifies but	Will not	Modifies but	Modifies but maintains

PCE	Treatment Prescription 1	Treatment Prescription 2	Treatment Prescription 3	Treatment Prescription 4	Treatment Prescription 5	Treatment Prescription 6	Prescribed Fire (in conjunction with other treatments)
	maintains	maintains	maintains	maintains	modify	maintains	

Management Indicator Species

Alternative 1 – No Action

Under the no action alternative habitats for all MIS would remain on the landscape. This alternative leaves the project area at a high risk to moderate and high severity fires which may remove late successional, riparian, chaparral, coarse woody debris, and hardwood habitat types. A high severity fire would create snags for the short term but the area surrounding the snags would lack a forest structure that is also used by snag dependent species (pileated woodpecker, northern spotted owl, northern goshawk, marten, fisher, etc.). After a high severity fire most coarse woody debris would be removed, but would also be created after snags created by the fire fall. Again, this CWD habitat would lack a surrounding forested structure required by CWD dependent species. In conclusion this alternative would maintain habitats for MIS species in the short-term but in the long-term could be deferential to all habitats and management indicator species.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

The proposed action would protect and enhance late successional, hardwood, chaparral, and riparian habitats. Snags >20" DBH will be retained in the project area unless they are a safety hazard or pose a risk to prescribed fire control. Snags that are felled will be retained on the ground as coarse woody debris. Coarse woody debris will be maintained at 5-10 tons per acre. Within the shaded fuel break, only one snag per quarter mile and one log per acre of the largest available will be retained. In conclusion, the proposed action will provide for habitats for all MIS species for the long-term.

Alternative 3 – No New Temporary Roads

Alternative three would provide the same habitat improvements as alternative 2.

Alternative 4 – No Commercial Thinning in Riparian Reserves

Alternative 4 would have similar effects to all MIS habitats as alternative 2 except in riparian reserves where thinning would be less intense. Under this alternative riparian habitat would be maintained and available for use by riparian dependent species.

Alternative 5 – No Commercial Thinning in Unit 3a, 19, 24b, and 33b (Northern Spotted Owl Nesting Habitat)

Alternative 5 would have similar impacts as alternative 2 on MIS habitats.

The Pine Mountain project will not adversely impact migratory landbird species or their associated habitats. Potential impacts to migratory species would be minimized through the adherence of LRMP Standards and Guidelines for snags and down woody debris, riparian reserve buffers, limited ground disturbance, and maintenance of canopy closure. The project is designed to improve habitat conditions through the acceleration of late-successional habitat characteristics, while still maintaining current functional habitat. Short-term impacts include the reduction of snags and coarse woody debris after initial treatment and subsequent burning. Burning is expected to create snags and downed logs but this process will take some time. Spring and fall burning would allow for a variability for fire

intensity and retention of large woody debris. Late summer and fall burns often lead to higher tree mortality and set back understory growth whereas spring burns have higher fuel moisture and may limit consumption of larger coarse woody debris. Late summer and fall burns may also create more snags than a spring burn since they tend to but also remove more coarse woody debris.

Specific project design criteria:

- Maintain all existing snags >20" DBH unless they pose a safety hazard or risk to prescribed fire control. Hazardous snags and snags >20" DBH felled to facilitate burning will be retained as CWD.
 - Within the Back Fire footprint, retain a minimum of four snags >20" DBH, unless deemed a safety hazard. If there are less than four snags per acre >20" DBH then retain the four largest snags available.
- Retain existing large CWD (>20" diameter, or largest available) up to 5-10 tons per acre.
- Within fuelbreaks:
 - Maintain one snag per quarter mile of fuelbreak,
 - Maintain CWD at one log per acre of largest available in decay class 1 or 2.
- Treatment Prescription 7 discusses mitigation measures for riparian reserves and streamside management zones.
- A LOP for northern spotted owls will be applied from February 1 – July 9 within ¼ mile of suitable nesting habitat to minimize the potential for direct or indirect take caused by smoke or noise.
 - Once protocol surveys are completed for NSO (September 2017), this LOP will only apply to occupied nesting habitat and Activity Centers.
- Due to the project's proximity to Lake Pillsbury, a LOP for bald eagle will be applied from January 1 – July 31 within a primary nest zone unless it can be determined that the bald eagles are not nesting. Primary nest zones are typically ½ mile around any known bald eagle nest.
- A LOP for northern goshawk will be applied from March 1 – August 31 within ¼ mile of active nest sites.
- A LOP for peregrine falcon will be applied from February 1 – July 31 if activities occur within ¼ mile of a known nest site.

References:

CalPIF (California Partners in Flight). 2002. Version 2.0. The oak woodland bird conservation plan: a strategy for protecting and managing oak woodland habitats and associated birds in California (S. Zack, lead author). Point Reyes Bird Observatory, Stinson Beach, CA.
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